



# solutions...

a magazine of the Illinois Department of Human Services

we're part of

Employment Family Support Emergency Assistance  
Family Reunification  
Neighborhood Stabilization  
Violence Prevention  
Prison Re-entry  
Drug Prevention  
Nutrition  
JUVENILE JUSTICE  
Accessibility  
Staff Recognition  
Housing  
Education  
Mental Health  
Male Involvement  
Violence Prevention  
Building Communities  
Physical Health  
Volunteering



### Editorial Staff

Carol L. Adams, Ph.D., Publisher  
Aurelio Huertas Fabrizio, Editor-in-Chief  
Mamie L. Rodgers, Managing Editor  
Willeva D. Lindsey, Contributing Editor  
Dru Fernandes, Graphic Designer  
Laura Vance, Proofreader

## staff:

### Solutions Contributors

Gaston Armour	Halle Ritter
Bureau of Family Nutrition	Karrie Rueter
Casie Camp	Ken Williams
Kimberly Fornero	Martha Younger-White
Bryce Goff	
Christine Harley	
Nanette V. Larson	Yvonne Jefferies, Freelance Writer
Gloster Mahon	Lindsay J.K. Nichols, Contributing Writer
Michael S. Pelletier	Debra Rawlings, Contributing Writer

**We welcome your comments, articles and contributions.  
Please send them to the DHS Office of Community Relations,  
or e-mail them to [Laura.Vance@illinois.gov](mailto:Laura.Vance@illinois.gov).**

**Illinois Department of Human Services  
401 South Clinton Street, Seventh Floor  
Chicago, IL 60607  
312-793-2342 (Voice)  
312-793-2354 (TTY)**

**100 South Grand Avenue East, Third Floor  
Springfield, IL 62762  
217-557-1601 (Voice)  
217-557-2134 (TTY)  
DHS website: [www.dhs.state.il.us](http://www.dhs.state.il.us)**

Printed by Authority of the State of Illinois



## Table of Contents

**Message from the Secretary** 4

**The Neighborhood Stabilization Program**  
*by Christine Harley* 5

**A Solution: Asset\$Illinois**  
*by Mamie L. Rodgers* 6

**“Say it out loud:” Making it Easier to Talk About Mental Health**  
*by Michael S. Pelletier and Lindsay J.K. Nichols* 8

**As Close as Your Phone**  
**The Illinois Mental Health Collaborative “Warm Line”  
Offers Invaluable Assistance**  
*by Nanette V. Larson and Bryce Goff* 9

**Black Barbershop  
Health Outreach Project**  
*by the Bureau of Family Nutrition* 10

**Pembroke Produce Pilot Project: DHS’ National Impact on WIC Program**  
*by Gaston Armour* 11

**Gathering the African American Male Perspective**  
*by Yvonne Jefferies* 12

**The Safety Net Works Prevents Violence**  
*by Mamie L. Rodgers* 13

**Safety NETS Basketball League**  
*by Casie Camp* 14

**A Solution: Summer Youth Employment Program**  
*by Yvonne Jefferies with Debra Rawlings* 16

**Redeploy Illinois**  
*by Karrie Rueter* 18

**A Solution: Open Door**  
*by Halle Ritter* 19

**A Solution: Reentry and Reunification in Englewood**  
*by Yvonne Jefferies with Gloster Mahon* 20

**The Serve Illinois Commission**  
*by Kimberly Fornero* 21

**The Northern Illinois University Tragedy - A New Way to Serve**  
*by Michael S. Pelletier* 22

**Platinum Customer Service Going the Extra Mile (PCS GEM)**  
*by Martha Younger-White* 23

**“Don’t Dis’ Your Ability”  
Resource Fair for Persons with Violently Acquired Disabilities**  
*by Ken Williams* 24

**Changing Climates**  
*by Willeva D. Lindsey* 25

**On Another Note** 26

**Recovery Radio**  
*by Mamie L. Rodgers* 28



10

12



14



3

# contents:

*solutions*

# *solutions...*

we're part of

## Message from the Secretary



Dear Colleagues,

In this issue of ***Solutions***, we feature our partners – agencies, institutions and stakeholders who, like us, have expressed a commitment to quality human services delivery in Illinois. The goals of these diverse components mirror the mission and vision of the Illinois Department of Human Services. We recognize the extreme value of mutual interests coupled with the growing need to undertake cooperative activities to ensure that we meet the heightened demands of people in need.

We continue to seek and forge new partnerships to support our efforts to develop new viable resources. This ***partnership*** edition highlights the work that DHS employees and providers have performed to cultivate and sustain collaborative relationships: ***The African American Male Task Force*** partners with the Black Caucus of the 95th Illinois General Assembly along with 2,000 stakeholders to address issues concerning Black men in Illinois. The ***Asset\$Illinois Educational and Homeownership*** initiatives have joined with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National City Bank in an effort to provide funds to offset costs related to educational pursuits and to position low and moderate income working people to be able to purchase homes. Seventeen communities in Illinois coalesce with ***The Safety Net Works*** to address strategies and implement programs to prevent youth violence throughout the state. ***“Say it out loud”*** brings together DHS’ Recovery Radio and Chicago Radio Station WVON to advance a popular mental health services awareness campaign located in Chicago and Springfield. ***The State of Illinois Neighborhood Stabilization Program*** is administered by DHS, in strong partnership with the Illinois Housing Development Authority and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and provides emergency assistance to local governments, developers and non profits to help alleviate many of the ills facing blighted communities in Illinois.

We are particularly proud of the successes that we have achieved in conjunction with the commitment and help of these and other partners too numerous to present here. It is significant that we have come together collaboratively rather than competitively. We shall continue to work together with our providers, stakeholders and advocates in an open and integrative manner.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol L. Adams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that curves upwards and to the right.

**Carol L. Adams, Ph.D.**  
**Secretary**  
**Illinois Department of Human Services**

## The Neighborhood Stabilization Program

by Christine Harley

**The bursting of the so-called “housing bubble”** and collapse of the U.S. credit market has reverberated throughout the world. One of the most significant outcomes has been a dramatic rise in home foreclosures and property abandonment.

**To address this crisis**, the U.S. Congress passed the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 last July. This bill created the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) to assist with the redevelopment of neighborhoods negatively impacted by increases in abandoned property and foreclosures.

**The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** earmarked nearly \$4 billion in funds for all 50 states and their areas of greatest need. Thirteen Illinois jurisdictions were directly allocated \$120 million in NSP funds, while another \$53 million went to the state to grant to other hard hit areas. In total, Illinois received \$173 million in NSP dollars.

Community	Allocation
ILLINOIS STATE PROGRAM	\$53,113,044
AURORA	\$3,083,568
CHICAGO	\$55,238,017
CICERO	\$2,078,351
COOK COUNTY	\$28,156,321
DU PAGE COUNTY	\$5,176,438
ELGIN	\$2,159,623
JOLIET	\$3,531,810
KANE COUNTY	\$2,576,369
LAKE COUNTY	\$4,600,800
MCHENRY COUNTY	\$3,085,695
ROCKFORD	\$2,287,004
ST CLAIR COUNTY	\$2,262,015
WILL COUNTY	\$5,160,424
<b>TOTAL for Illinois</b>	<b>\$172,509,479</b>

### The Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) was

designated the state’s lead agency for NSP. DHS is collaborating with the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to allocate NSP funds throughout the state.

**Under the direction of the Governor’s Office**, these three partner agencies created the Substantial Amendment to the 2008 State Consolidated Plan for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (Plan Amendment). The amendment seeks to ensure that the NSP funds are directed to areas of greatest need, provide real community impact, are awarded to applicants with the capacity to complete projects within the mandated timeframe, and are awarded to projects that are most ready to proceed.

**The program additionally requires** that all funds benefit persons with incomes of 120 percent of the area median income (AMI) or less, while at least 25 percent of the funds benefit households earning under 50 percent AMI, or approximately 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. The state has increased this goal to award up to 40 percent of its NSP funds to benefit households earning 50 percent AMI and to



*Celebrating the receipt by the Neighborhood Stabilization Program of a \$53 million award - from left to right - Karen Youngblood, NSP Policy Associate, DHS; Jane Bilger, Assistant Executive Director, IHDA; Carol L. Adams, Secretary, DHS; Ray Willis, Director, Community Planning and Development, HUD; Grace Hou, Assistant Secretary of Programs, DHS; Kirstin Williams, NSP Project Manager, DHS.*

increase affordable, community-based housing options for persons with disabilities.

**Eligible activities for use of funds** include establishing financing mechanisms for: the acquisition and rehabilitation of foreclosed properties; purchase and rehabilitation of residential properties for rent or for sale; demolition and redevelopment; establishment of land banks for abandoned property; and redevelopment of demolished or vacant property.

**“This is an excellent opportunity** for DHS to help local communities hard-hit by the foreclosure crisis,” stated Grace Hou, DHS assistant secretary of programs, “and provide additional community-based housing options for DHS customers. We are thrilled to be working with IHDA and DCEO to distribute these valuable funds to high-need communities across the state.”

**HUD approved the Plan Amendment** and signed the NSP grant agreement with the state on March 4, 2009. The deadline to submit applications for NSP funds was on May 4, 2009. Currently the state is in the process of reviewing applications and selecting its sub-recipients. Sub-recipients have a total of four years to use the funds.

**DHS is excited to be a part of providing** solutions for stabilizing local communities, increasing community-based housing options for persons with disabilities, and improving affordable housing options throughout the state. For more information, visit: <http://www.dhs.state.il.us.gov/nsf>.

**Christine Harley is a project manager in the Office of Assistant Secretary for Programs.**

## A Solution:

# Asset\$Illinois

by Mamie L. Rodgers

**Asset\$Illinois is a solution-oriented approach to creating financial stability for Illinois families. The Illinois Department of Human Services partners with public and private sectors to offer Illinois residents Individual Development Accounts to help them purchase a first home and pursue education through homeownership and education initiatives.**

### Asset\$Illinois: Homeownership Initiative

*"Me and my family moved from 762 square feet of love to more than double that amount," is how Scott, one of the first participants in the Asset\$Illinois Homeownership Initiative, describes the outcome of his investment in this program.*

#### Asset\$Illinois Homeownership program is enjoying success.

Scott is one of eight Illinois residents who purchased homes with Asset\$Illinois matching funds in 2008. Thanks to Project Director Kevin Davy and his staff, another six families have completed the financial education requirements and are expected to purchase homes in early 2009. Additionally, 50 new accounts have been established. Kevin and his staff will continue providing customer service and a savings opportunity for future Illinois homeowners who are striving to own property for the first time.

Asset\$Illinois is a viable solution to homeownership because, "without the experience or training in buying and keeping a home, people can easily pay too much or make poor choices that will eventually jeopardize their financial health," says DeShana L. Forney, executive director of the Illinois Housing Development Authority.

#### Asset\$Illinois is about saving money now to build equity for the future.

Many low and moderate income families struggle to save for a down payment on a home. This program provides the information and on-going support Illinois residents need to develop and implement a savings

plan. Scott said, "The program provided me with financial counseling and I picked up lots of tips."

As of June 2008, 110 Illinois residents are enrolled in the program and are saving an average of \$125 per month. This is reportedly five times the amount saved by participants in similar programs throughout the United States. All 110 residents will, as Scott did, receive financial counseling and education. A goal of the program is to ensure that participants have the knowledge needed to make informed purchasing decisions, and the financial skills to protect their investment after the purchase.

#### Asset\$Illinois uses customer-centered and customer-friendly technology.

Accessibility and ease of use are at the core of good customer service, which is why the housing initiative is fully automated. Kevin Davy says, "Thanks to today's technology, we have never had to meet with five of our seven home purchasers in order to complete the process. Participants completed financial management training electronically. They made deposits electronically, and we paid their vendors electronically. This electronic process allows us to serve the entire state of Illinois right from our office. The technology also helps staff work with residents to monitor their savings performance."

#### Asset\$Illinois, an unbelievable solution!

"About that program!?!?" That is the question Vicki, the first Asset\$Illinois homeowner, was asked by her lender and attorney at the end of her closing. They didn't believe she was "really going to receive the matching funds." Vicki, now lives in a beautiful two-story, three-bedroom house, with hardwood floors, a huge backyard and much more room for her children to play. And yet, "Sometimes," Vicki says, "I still think it's a dream."

*"Frankly, the program is timely. It addresses the needs of low and moderate income people throughout this state and provides a realistic path for many of them to escape poverty."*

Kevin Davy

**"If there is no struggle, there is no progress."**

**Frederick Douglas**



*Thanks to a grant from Asset\$Illinois, Patty Redpath and her family celebrated Thanksgiving 2008 in their newly-built five bedroom home in Sangamon County. What a way to celebrate!!*

## **Asset\$Illinois: Educational Initiative**

**Asset\$Illinois Education - A new initiative and a new solution for low and moderate income residents who want to increase their education in order to qualify for employment opportunities and build personal wealth.**

***"We want to train people to have careers, not jobs. The Asset\$Illinois Education Initiative is a "hand up, not a hand out."***

***Carol L. Adams, Ph.D., Secretary, DHS***

**Asset\$Illinois Education Initiative provides** financial support. Illinois residents can use money from Asset\$Illinois to pay for tuition and books for classes taken at Illinois community colleges and four-year state colleges. When a student is enrolled in school, Asset\$Illinois money can also be used to pay for a personal computer as well as software related to classes.

**Asset\$Illinois Education matches** resident's savings. Participants can save up to \$650 in their Individual Development Account. The amount that the participant saves will be matched 3:1, giving participants up to \$2,600 in savings and matching funds to complete their education.

## **Partners:**

**Illinois Housing Development Authority  
Partnership for Homeownership  
U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services**

**Asset\$Illinois Education welcomes** Illinois residents who have a GED or high school diploma, received the Illinois earned income tax credit on last year's tax form, and have a checking account. This program is for families who are, according to Secretary Carol L. Adams, serious about earning more income.

**Asset\$Illinois Education is a solution** made possible as a result of DHS partnering with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Instituto Del Progreso Latino, Chicago Urban League, Centers for New Horizons, Enlace Chicago, and the Chinese American Service League.

**This initiative offers a viable solution** to those seeking a higher standard of living because, as Secretary Adams also says, "Adding economic value to the marketplace results in more money and wealth for families." If low and moderate income families use the Asset\$Illinois Education funds for training in careers where the demand for employees is high, the likely result will be better employment opportunities and a higher quality of life for families.

## **Asset\$Illinois is the Department's mission in action.**

**A commitment to assist Illinois residents** in their efforts to achieve maximum self-sufficiency and independence is the reason DHS has formed partnerships to provide housing and educational opportunities. These partnerships are making it possible for people who have historically been under-represented among homeowners to purchase their first home. In addition, the partnerships are creating avenues for people to begin or continue their education. Both initiatives are designed to increase opportunities to build wealth.

**With the assistance of DHS staff,** the number of first-time homeowners will continue to increase, families budgeted for the education initiative will enroll in and complete training programs, and DHS will, once again, see its mission in action.

For more information on these programs, go to **[www.dhs.state.il.us/assets](http://www.dhs.state.il.us/assets)**.

**Mamie L. Rodgers is the acting director of Community Relations.**

*solutions*

**7**

## “Say it out loud:” Making it Easier to Talk About Mental Health

by Michael S. Pelletier and Lindsay J.K. Nichols

**Guidance on how to promote** our overall physical health and well-being is everywhere. People talk openly about the importance of a good night's sleep and regular exercise. When children are sick, they are typically excused from school. If diagnosed with a health condition that needs treatment, loved ones provide emotional support. When we're not feeling well, those around us are quick to lend a hand. Why is the same not true for our mental health?

**Nationally, more than 20 percent** of the population lives with a mental health challenge. Data obtained from the U.S. Census and Center for Mental Health Services indicates that more than 700,000 Illinois adults are coping with a diagnosable mental illness. **While 70-90 percent of mental health diagnoses are treatable, fewer than half of the people who experience mental health challenges actually seek treatment.**

**Reluctance to talk openly** about mental health is so strong it prevents us from seeking the information and support we need and asking for help. This is very costly to us as a society and as individuals. DHS sought a solution to this challenge



Director Lorrie Jones addresses over 400 supporters at Navy Pier to celebrate the launch of the “Say it out loud” campaign.

by launching “Say it out loud” in collaboration with the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership. “Say it out loud” is a three-year awareness, engagement and education campaign.

**The purpose of the campaign** is to increase awareness of mental health as a vital component of our overall health and well-being and promote sustainable change in behaviors. The campaign was launched at a rally on May 1, 2008 at Chicago’s Navy Pier when the state began its annual observance of Mental Health Awareness Month. Scores of mental health advocates and Illinois residents living with mental health challenges attended the rally. Many wore the campaign’s signature yellow T-shirt emblazoned with “Say it out loud” in blue.

**Dr. Lorrie Jones, director of DHS Mental Health Services, notes** that everything we do to promote good mental health in ourselves and the people we care about contributes to more healthy, productive and happy lives. She said, “Help is available for those who need it. However, too often we’re reluctant to ask the right questions, or to express our concern or seek support. The “Say it out loud” campaign is about helping people find an easier way to talk about this critical component of our total health.”

**The campaign is using print and electronic media** to tell the stories of real Illinoisans. It describes five steps that everybody can take to help promote good mental health for themselves and the people they care about: (1) Talk with someone who seems stressed or down; (2) Let them know you care; (3) Ask for help from someone you trust if you think you or your child might need it; (4) Speak with your child’s doctor or teachers about how to encourage your child’s social and emotional development; and (5) Encourage policy leaders to make children and adult mental health a top priority.

**Find out how you can promote good mental health** by visiting the campaign’s web site at [www.mentalhealthillinois.org](http://www.mentalhealthillinois.org).

**Michael S. Pelletier is the special assistant to the director of Mental Health.**

**Lindsay J.K. Nichols is communication director of the Metropolitan Group.**

**"No person is your friend who demands your silence or denies your right to grow."**

Alice Walker

## **As Close as Your Phone The Illinois Mental Health Collaborative "Warm Line" Offers Invaluable Assistance**

by Nanette V. Larson and Bryce Goff

**We take order, normalcy and organization** for granted...until they're not there. Life quickly teaches that the antithesis of help and support is isolation and loneliness. Coping with mental and emotional distress can also mean coping with times of chaos or unwanted separation from those whom we hold most dear. With the establishment of a "warm line" last year, the Illinois Mental Health Collaborative, in partnership with the Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health (DHS/DMH) and ValueOptions, Inc., has provided a source for human connection we all need from time to time for our well-being.

**A warm line is neither a crisis nor information line.** Yet it would be wrong to characterize it as something in between or even as just another telephone resource. It is a cutting edge source of peer and family support. Under the immediate supervision of the Collaborative's Recovery and Resilience Director, Bryce Goff, through its toll free number, the warm line, staffed by five Peer and Family Support Specialists, receives from 60 to 120 calls per week. These professionals are persons in recovery, or family members of persons in recovery, who are trained to effectively support recovery in other individuals' lives. They reaffirm, reconnect and renew hope, and provide practical assistance for overcoming mental illnesses to persons who are striving to live, learn, work and participate fully in their communities.

**Warm Line Peer and Family Support Specialists** lend more than just a sympathetic ear to callers. They offer:

- Emotional Support by listening and understanding
- Recovery Education by providing and linking persons to new mental health recovery information
- Self-Advocacy guidance by helping individuals learn to communicate effectively to ensure that their needs are met
- Mentoring through boosting the confidence of individuals as they progress toward their recovery goals

**Many callers have found** that these support mechanisms give them new tools to advance their own recoveries.

**While the warm line is one** of its more prominent endeavors, the Recovery and Resilience Team continues to engage in a variety of other proactive initiatives including producing the groundbreaking *Consumer and Family Handbook*, participating in recovery education events across the state and providing technical and administrative expertise to the division's Recovery Support Specialists. Additionally, they have developed content for the Collaborative's informative website, [www.IllinoisMentalHealthCollaborative.com](http://www.IllinoisMentalHealthCollaborative.com), and other multi-faceted projects to advance the recovery vision. These additional professional responsibilities do not take away from the Recovery and Resilience team's warm line duties. To the contrary; they work to enhance the Collaborative's investment in the warm line's ongoing availability to Illinoisans. In turn, the warm line has already become a successful DHS/DMH investment by assuring the accessibility of "a human connection" at a time when it is needed now more than ever.

**Although warm lines are found throughout** the U.S., Illinois and Maine are the only states known to operate statewide Warm Lines. The Illinois Mental Health Collaborative's toll free warm line (866-359-7953; (TTY) 866-880-4459) is open from 8 AM through 5 PM Monday through Friday, except holidays. Simply select option #2 for Consumers and Families, then option #5 for Warm Line Peer and Family Support by Telephone.

**Nanette V. Larson is the director of Recovery Support Services for the Division of Mental Health.**

**Bryce Goff is the Recovery and Resilience director of the Illinois Mental Health Collaborative for Access and Choice.**

## Black Barbershop Health Outreach Project

by the Bureau of Family Nutrition

**The new century did not begin well** for Black men with respect to their wellness. All the health indicators point to a dismal decade for them when we examine the health-related issues affecting Black men, from heart problems to hyper-cholesterol, from obesity to hypertension, from the day-to-day stress of unemployment and underemployment to the ever-growing problems of maintaining family and social positions. The prospects for healthier trends for this decade with respect to Black men do not bode well, unless we find more solutions to encourage them to regularly see health care providers and lead more health-conscious lives. Last May, DHS accepted this challenge by launching the Black Barbershop Health Outreach Project, where staff members and partnership volunteers spend designated Saturdays in barbershops providing free health screenings and life-saving information about diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

**The purpose** of the Black Barbershop Health Outreach Program is to:

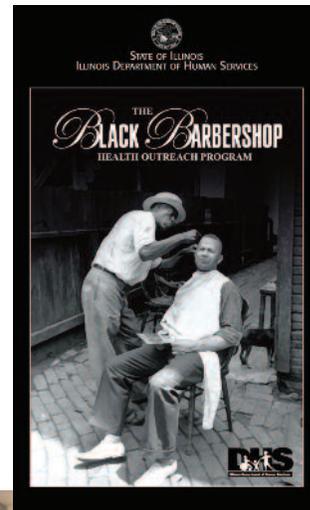
- Promote public awareness of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases
- Educate African American men and their families about the need for screening and early diagnosis and treatment to prevent the onset of these potentially devastating diseases
- Provide appropriate medical referrals

**Diabetes has reached epidemic proportions** in the United States. In Illinois alone, more than 841,000 adults (age 18 and older) have diagnosed diabetes (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion). Over 400,000 are males, and 266,000 are Non-Hispanic Blacks. An additional 260,000 adults may have undiagnosed diabetes, and approximately 3 million Illinois residents are at risk for developing type 2 diabetes due to increasing obesity and sedentary lifestyles (Illinois Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System).

**Cardiovascular disease accounts** for more deaths (39,079) in Illinois than any other cause - - representing 37 percent of all deaths. In Illinois, African Americans have the highest cardiovascular disease mortality rates, more than 35.2 percent higher compared to other races (Burden of Heart Disease and Stroke in Illinois: Mortality, Morbidity and Risk Factors Report).

**With our Community Health and Prevention** division serving as liaison, we have partnered with volunteers from other state agencies:

the Illinois Diabetes Commission, University of Illinois School of Public Health, Abbott Laboratories, the Black Nurses Association, Everest College, neighboring hospitals and pharmacy schools, as well as Bill Releford, D.P.M., Director of the Diabetes Amputation Foundation of Los Angeles, California, who achieved previous success with the Black Barbershop Health Outreach Program in Los Angeles.



**Our volunteers have visited barbershops** throughout the Chicago area, measuring blood pressures, screening for diabetes, distributing information, and making referrals for approximately 400 participants.



**Barbershop clients are very receptive** to our counseling and discussions, and the owners are enthusiastic about promoting health education. We created partnerships with local barbers so they can become health advocates for their clients by distributing health information year-round.

**Traditionally, Black men from all walks** of life convene in barbershops to discuss work, relationships, family, politics, hobbies and a myriad of other issues affecting their lives. The goal is to get them to also talk about their health, and learn to live healthy lifestyles.

## **Pembroke Produce Pilot Project: DHS’ National Impact on WIC Program**

by **Gaston Armour**

**Pembroke is one of the poorest cities** in Illinois and is, therefore, one of six cities that are supported by TEAM Illinois. The solution-driven work that TEAM Illinois does enabled the development and implementation of the Pembroke Produce Pilot Project.

**TEAM Illinois partners**, including Kankakee Community College, Catholic Charities, Western Illinois University, Kankakee County Board, a wide range of community organizations, and 33 state agencies worked with community stakeholders to assist in the development of what DHS Secretary Carol L. Adams calls “a blueprint for prosperity” for Pembroke communities. The planning process led to the identification of over 90 items that community stakeholders agreed would build capacity and improve the quality of life for Pembroke’s citizens. Issues such as inadequate access to fresh fruits and vegetables; available, but underutilized farmland; skilled, unemployed farmers; and the economic impact of industrialized food production led to the decision to implement the Pembroke Produce Pilot Project. The objectives of the pilot included: (1) helping farmers create sustainable jobs; (2) supporting and expanding established markets to sell their products; and (3) involving the WIC (Women Infants and Children) program in efforts to address childhood obesity.

**To implement the objectives**, DHS collaborated with Catholic Charities and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to buy fresh produce from the Pembroke farmers and sell the farmers’ fruits and vegetables to the WIC centers in Chicago. WIC centers consequently expanded food preparation demonstrations to include fresh fruits and vegetables. WIC customers were very receptive and enjoyed the new fresh produce program. Now families are able to get fresh healthy foods from local WIC centers, and the farmers from Pembroke are able to sell more locally grown produce.

**Inspired by this WIC component** of the Pembroke Produce Project, U.S. Congressman Bobby Rush (IL) incorporated language in the 2008 Farm Bill

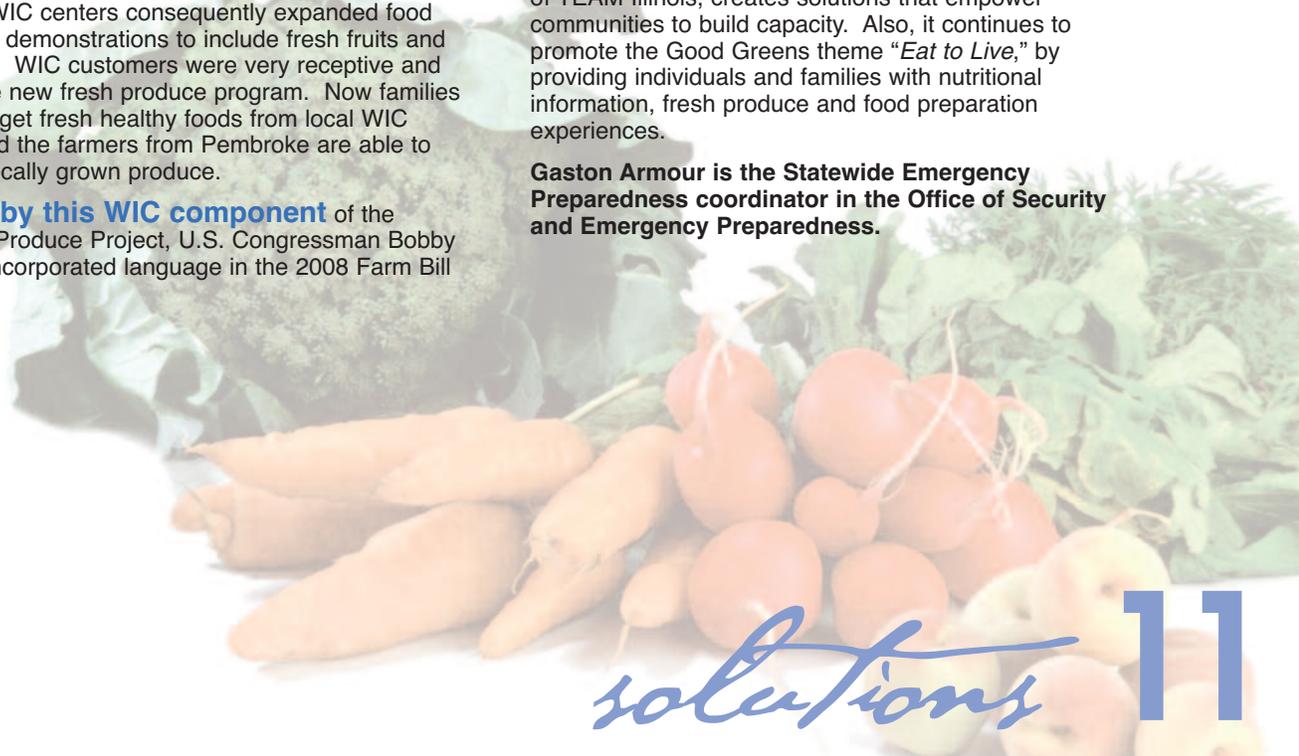
that required all WIC centers throughout the country to offer fresh produce in their healthy foods initiative. In essence, over 30 years ago when the WIC centers opened, they only had dry goods, i.e., cereals, cheese, powered milk, etc. The intent of the legislation is to reflect the current need of family nutrition while addressing obesity.

**Pembroke partnered with the Chicago Food Systems Collaborative** in the Austin community. That partnership enabled the community of Pembroke to get the technical assistance it needed in order to market and distribute its produce and for urban communities to have access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

**In September 2008, the Good Greens in Illinois Collaboration** held the Good Greens Festival: “*Eat to Live*” at the DuSable Museum in Chicago. Congressman Rush described the festival as, “a groundbreaking, one-day inaugural event that is the launching pad for a new movement to engage Black Americans on issues of food access, health and green economy jobs in Chicago and throughout the United States.” The festival included panel discussions, resources, food tasting, entertainment and a farmer’s market.

**The Pembroke Produce initiative** is another example of how DHS, through the collaborative efforts of TEAM Illinois, creates solutions that empower communities to build capacity. Also, it continues to promote the Good Greens theme “*Eat to Live*,” by providing individuals and families with nutritional information, fresh produce and food preparation experiences.

**Gaston Armour is the Statewide Emergency Preparedness coordinator in the Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness.**



## Gathering the African American Male Perspective

by Yvonne Jefferies

**Announcements were heard** on local radio stations. Flyers flooded communities. Churches, schools, community and faith-based organizations participated in getting the word out. African American men across the State of Illinois were being invited to town hall meetings to raise awareness and develop solutions that address the challenges facing the African American community.

**The meetings represented a response** to Illinois Senate Bill 776, an amendment to the IDHS Act. The amendment, sponsored by State Senator Kwame Raoul (D) and State Representative Marlow Colvin (D), called for the creation of the first statewide Task Force on the Condition of African American Men in Illinois. The task force addressed issues such as incarceration and parole rates, high school and post secondary education, economic earnings, child welfare, life expectancy, and health disparities. DHS Secretary Carol L. Adams said that, "As a state, we must work hard to address the disparities and lack of opportunities that create barriers to success in our communities."

**In September and October of 2008**, 3,000 people, mostly African American men, gathered in eight cities, home to 70 percent of the one million African American males who reside in Illinois: Matteson, Peoria, Rockford, Springfield, East St. Louis, Champaign, Chicago, and Pembroke. They gathered in response to the invitation to share their experiences and their perspectives on factors that contribute to the conditions of African American men.

**Representatives from the 95th Illinois General Assembly**, city and county governments, educational institutions, the business community, the faith-based community, and civic and community-based agencies attended the meetings. They listened as African American men of various ages and educational achievements, family backgrounds, employment and criminal justice histories, as well as states of well-being answered the Task Force's questions in their own words. These men talked about perceptions of them as lazy, prone to violence, corrupt, apathetic fathers, deadbeat dads, and unpatriotic. They offered strong beliefs about why the challenges they face persist, why the challenges have become systemic and what DHS can do about what one man called "a right now thing."



**As of this writing, the exploratory meetings**, which represent one phase of this project, have been completed. The Task Force is currently in the process of evaluating state programs to identify gaps in service delivery. The final report, which is expected this spring, will be presented to the Illinois General Assembly. It will include the findings from the nine town hall meetings and recommendations for closing service gaps, as well as maximizing coordination. As is the intent of the Task Force and DHS, the report will suggest strategies for finding and implementing solutions that will improve conditions of African American men.

**Yvonne Jefferies is a freelance writer and author of *Referee or Team Builder?: A Director's Role in Managing Conflict*.**

## The Safety Net Works Prevents Violence

by Mamie L. Rodgers

**The incidences of violence** both by and against youth have parents, community advocates and government officials screaming for a solution. The need to protect youth from further violence is crucial, and the promotion of violence prevention strategies is a critical response to that need.

**The Governor's office said**, "Let's work hand-in-hand with community organizations." DHS Secretary Carol L. Adams said, "Each community will work to develop a plan that will meet the unique needs of the population it serves." Aisha Latiker, a 17-year-old resident of the Pullman community and a member of Kids Off the Block, said, "The response will have to involve young people."

**Working from the premise that preventing violence** is most successful when approached holistically, DHS wanted those involved in this solution to have the capacity and the capability to address a wide range of individual, family and community issues and concerns.

**The goal was simple: Violence Prevention.** The expectation was clear: That state resources, marshalled through The Safety Net Works initiative, would reduce violence among our youth.

**With DHS leading the way**, 6 cities and 17 communities across the state of Illinois with high rates of poverty, violence, and domestic distress, participated in this solution. Agencies and organizations were identified that focused on child welfare, domestic violence prevention and intervention, economic development, educational services, employment, health, juvenile justice, out-of-school time programs, recreation and social activities, sports, substance abuse prevention and youth services. These agencies and organizations formed coalitions; the coalitions created The Safety Net Works that serves 12 to 24 year-olds.



Youth addressing violence in "Let the Kidz Live" campaign.

**And so, in March 2008**, The Safety Net Works went into effect across the state of Illinois. According to Xavier Williams, DHS Safety Net Works Manager, "No time was wasted getting youth involved. Summer jobs were made available to 10,000 youth throughout the state of Illinois, of which 1,800 were provided to The Safety Net Works sites. They learned and practiced leadership skills, participated in educational development and other activities that boosted their confidence and re-focused them on their potential."

**By the end of the summer**, it was clear that ongoing participation is needed, but The Safety Net Works initiative is an effective solution. The citywide Safety Net Works Youth Leadership Council, developed by Williams, is one example. The Council provides youth with constructive leadership roles that will allow them to continue to develop, and at the same time acknowledges the value of their involvement in the state's efforts to be a safety net for its youth.

### **This year, each coalition will hire**

one youth organizer. These organizers will provide the coalitions with the perspective that is needed to build on the intergenerational interaction that is such an important factor in The Safety Net Works accomplishments.

For more information, contact Xavier Williams at [Xavier.Williams@illinois.gov](mailto:Xavier.Williams@illinois.gov) or 312-793-4399.

**Mamie L. Rodgers is the acting director of Community Relations.**

## Partners:

Black United Fund of Illinois  
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council  
Children Home and Aid  
Community Assistance Program  
Corazon Community Services  
East St. Louis Township  
Enlace  
Good Samaritan Community Service  
Grand Boulevard Federation  
Illinois Community College Board  
Illinois Criminal Justice Authority  
Illinois Department of Aging  
Illinois Department of Children and Family Service  
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity  
Illinois Department of Corrections  
Illinois Department of Employment Security  
Illinois Department of Human Services  
Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice  
Illinois Department of Public Health  
Illinois Department of Transportation  
Illinois Housing Development Authority  
Illinois State Board of Education  
Illinois State Board of Higher Education  
Illinois Violence Prevention Authority  
Maywood Youth Mentoring  
Mount Vernon Church  
Patriots Gateway Community Center  
Southwest Youth Collaborative  
St. Sabina  
Target  
Westside Health Authority  
YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago  
Youth With A Positive Direction

## Safety NETS Basketball League

by Casie Camp

**Last summer**, the Illinois Department of Human Services initiated the Safety NETS Basketball League (SNBL). The program is designed to offer young adults a positive, violence free alternative to illicit activities that occur in Illinois neighborhoods, most often between the hours of 10 PM and 2 AM.

**All SNBL basketball players are required** to participate in educational workshops and counseling sessions with their coaches after each game. This activity is mandatory and absence from the meetings can result in player ineligibility. It is during the course of these forums that coaches and young men discuss personal issues, employment preparedness strategies, and other matters related to their efforts to help stop the violence in their neighborhoods and to help promote positive lifestyle changes among their friends and families.



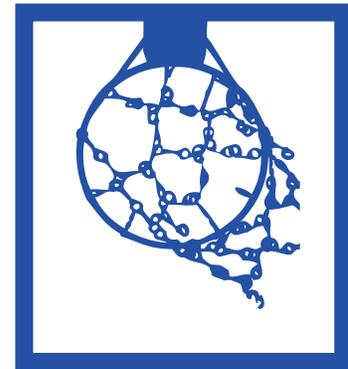
**In talking about how this program started**, SNBL Commissioner Gil Walker recalled its history. "It is the exact prototype of The Midnight Basketball League founded in 1987 by G.V. Standifer in Glendon, Maryland. DHS Secretary Carol L. Adams introduced Midnight Basketball to Chicago and it just grew to national acclaim."

**"There are many success stories** about the young men who have turned their lives around after becoming involved in the Midnight Basketball League.

Hundreds of young men have gone on to college and graduate school and became successful family men and citizens," Secretary Adams states.

**The SNBL structure is patterned** after the National Basketball League. Teams are sponsored by, and frequently named for, public and private agencies and corporations whose executives underwrite costs for athletic gear, facility maintenance and stipends for coaches.

**Phase One launched at four locations**, where 320 players participated, representing 32 teams (10 players per team) and their coaches. Initially all sites were situated in Chicago at: JLM Abundant Life Community Center, South Central Community Center, The Ark at St. Sabina, and the Salvation Army.



**safetynets**  
STATE OF ILLINOIS



**“One’s work may be finished one day, but ones education never.”**

**Alexandre Dumas**



**On August 13th DHS hosted** the SNBL Opening Ceremony at Malcolm X College in Chicago. It was a great success! More than 300 basketball players, young men ages 18-26, represented the new league. The season “tip off” was August 18, when the games began. In October, the Final Four Championship Games were held at Martin Luther King High School in Chicago.

**Sponsors of the 2008 Safety NETS Basketball League are:**

Black Entertainment Television (BET); the Black United Fund; the Chicago Area Project; Coleman Development Corporation II; Illinois Department of Human Services; The Safer Foundation; Saint Sabina Church; The Salvation Army; South Central Community Center and WVON Radio. Congratulations to the Black Entertainment Television (BET) SNBL Team for winning the Final Four Championship. Just recently, National Basketball Association stars, Derek Rose of the Chicago Bulls and Michael Finley with the San Antonio Spurs became partners of the program.

**Phase II of the Safety NETS Basketball League** was launched February 18 in Englewood on the Southside of Chicago and in Maywood.

The commissioner, coaches and staff are reaching out to organizations, corporations, agencies and individuals who can make a donation, sponsor a team or underwrite costs of an entire league. As support continues to grow, so will SNBL.

**Partners and sponsors are integral** to the success of the SNBL. Their continuous involvement in the program and their commitment to safe neighborhoods and character-building opportunities for young men exceeded all expectations. The SNBL teams and coaches are indeed grateful to the partners and DHS employees who supported this initiative by making contributions and attending games throughout the season.

For more information, contact Casie Camp at **Casie.Camp@illinois.gov** or 312-793-2352.

**Casie Camp is the executive assistant for Special Projects.**

**Below is a listing of finalists during the Phase One Playoffs:**

**Eastern & Northern Division**

Quentin Coopwood  
Daniel Crawford  
Kenny Harris  
Mario Harris  
Calvin Paramore  
Marcus Smith  
D’juan Stewart  
Lawrence Walton  
Jimmy Williams

**Western & Southern Division**

Almi  
Brandon Bowler  
Jason Frierson  
Charles Golden  
Anton Higgins  
Lewis Johnson  
Ray Oakley  
Hillard Reed  
Marvin Turner

**Three- Point Shot Champions**

Northern Division  
Southern Division  
Western Division  
Eastern Division

Charles Porter  
Jason Paige  
Jason Frierson  
Daniel Crawford

**Slam Dunk Contest**

Northern Division  
Southern Division  
Western Division  
Eastern Division

Dijuan Stewart  
Amrick Whitehead  
Tyrin Buford  
Kenneth Harris

## A Solution: Summer Youth Employment Program

by Yvonne Jefferies with Debra Rawlings, Contributor

**A Pembroke youth said**, "I really can't believe we're getting this chance to earn some money, as well as learn a trade." In 2008, Illinois departments of Human Services, Transportation, and Corrections funded the Summer Youth Employment Program that reached out to this youth and 9,999 other youth.

**The agencies collaborated** on an eight-week statewide youth employment program that exposed youth, ages 13 to 22, to professional, skilled and semi-skilled jobs in government, not-for-profit organizations, and privately-own businesses. Thirteen to 15 year olds worked on community service projects. Sixteen to 18 year olds worked on community development projects. Nineteen to 22 year olds worked on transportation related jobs. In addition, every youth attended mandatory life skills training.

**Employment, as a solution** to keeping youth safe, developing youth and promoting community service, "can be that one more chance for somebody" said 19-year-old Jerrica. Examples of "chances" created, and returns on investments for the Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Department of Transportation, and Illinois Department of Corrections are highlighted below.

### Green Employment – Windmills As Alternative Energy

"**Man, I can't do that,**" was the response of most of the youth when Christine Perkins, executive director of Inner City Youth Foundation, laid out 40 pieces of wood and said, "You're going to use these to build two windmills." Youth were divided into four groups and assembled different parts of the windmills. Two weeks later, the youth who said, "I can't" were giving each other high-fives as the ten feet windmills were installed on the grounds of the Chicago Urban League.

### I Cry: A Hip-Hop Opera

**Victoria Brady, executive director** of Ray of Hope Center of the Arts said, "One of the youth suggested the Opera. I provided the guidance." The youth researched, wrote, choreographed and produced *I Cry*, a solution-driven Hip-Hop Opera.

**When the curtain rose** at the Regal Theater on August 21, an audience of 200 saw 50 male and female dancers spinning and turning as if wrapped in

peace. As often happens in the community, the next scene showed their reaction when peace was disrupted by violence. They asked in song, dance and *Spoken Word*, "Do you see what's going on?" As the curtain fell, two youth, flanked by 20 dancers in red and black, asked in *Spoken Word*: "Who's responsible?" The audience's response: a standing ovation mixed with bravo.

### Violence Prevention: The Experience. The Learning. The Hope.

**Sylvia Diggs, program coordinator** for the Maywood Safety Net Works Violence Prevention Program, held a job fair. Eighty youth attended. Fifty youth were enrolled on a first-come-first-serve basis. They worked in agencies, childcare centers, and on teams that cleaned and beautified communities. Youth who had not completed high school participated in return-to-school activities that included assistance with financial aid forms.

**When the program ended**, youth were recognized at two community parades and celebrated at an indoor obstacle course. They evaluated their experience by responding to three questions: What was your experience? What did you learn? What is your hope?

**About the experience**, a 15 year old said, "Once you have opportunities like this, you have more than expected."

**The hope for most youth** was that the Maywood Safety Net Works Violence Prevention Program will continue to thrive because, "It gave us something to do."



**“Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepared for it today.”**

**Malcolm X**

## **Giving Back In Rantoul, Illinois**

**Forty youth began the program** with tips from Rev. Nelson Cuevas, director of Cultivadores Latino, that included the importance of coping with your boss even if s/he “is a jerk,” and having fun while approaching work assignments professionally. To the youth who would clean the streets, he said, “Any job is honorable. You’ve got to start somewhere.” With these words of encouragement, 13 to 15 year-olds picked up brooms, dustpans and garbage bags needed to beautify Veterans Park. Older youth delivered food to families, handed out lunches at the youth center or groceries at a food pantry. Others sorted and priced merchandise for a garage sale, participated in a car wash and produced a flyer for the Summer Migrant Education Program.

**When the program ended**, youth had given back and in turn had received. Even those who uttered the occasional “Ew-w-w,” when picking up an assortment of litter, expressed appreciation for their jobs and for being able to buy what they needed for school. “A bridge was built,” says Cuevas. The multi-ethnic group of youth who participated in the program now comes to the Center. Some youth get really upset when they see garbage in Veterans Park and the community continues to express its gratitude.



## **Chicago Area Project - Return on Investment**

**Chicago Area Project partnered** with programs in Chicago and 19 suburban communities to create work experiences for youth. For many, this was their first summer job. Youth cleaned overpasses, highways and public transit streets. They assisted architects and other contractors working on the redevelopment of Wentworth Gardens. Others produced and distributed a newsletter. Some worked with professional movers.

Barbara Harris, director of the CAP Summer Employment Program, said, “It is empowering for youth to invest their time and get returns greater than the money they earned.” Comments such as: “I learned how to limit the money I spend;” “Just because you have money, doesn’t mean you know the value of a dollar;” “I know what having a substantial job can do for you;” and “Doing work and working hard has favorable rewards,” shows not only that youth agree, but that they are empowered.



## **Homework Hangout – It’s All About the Check!**

**The youth repeated**, “It’s all about the check,” like it was the hook for a hip-hop song. Keith Anderson, President and CEO of Homework Hangout, used this phrase for program orientation. Youth 14 to 18, and young adults 19 to 22, learned why work ethics, appropriate workplace behavior, workplace expectations and accountability are important if you want the check.

**Work experiences provided an opportunity** for youth to apply what they learned in the program. Some tutored and mentored younger children; produced public service announcements about STDs; distributed violence prevention flyers; and worked with the park district and the airport. At the request of State’s Attorney Jack Ahola, four youth worked in his office.

**By the end of the program**, youth were not only saying the phrase, but their attire, tone of voice, language, work ethics, and quality of work demonstrated the extent to which they had internalized it. Most importantly, they became the standard bearer for each other and when necessary said, “That will not fly at Homework Hangout.”

**Yvonne Jefferies is a freelance writer and author of *Referee or Team Builder?: A Director’s Role in Managing Conflict*.**

**Debra Rawlings is a reporter for the Rantoul Press.**

## Redeploy Illinois

by Karrie Rueter

**The Challenge:** Every year, juvenile incarcerations cost the state an upwards of \$100 million. Treatment of juvenile offenders using community-based services is generally less expensive and has a considerably higher success rate. However, from the fiscal perspective of a county, there may be an incentive to commit the youth to the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ). While a community-based program may be more cost-effective, the county must pay the cost, whereas a commitment to IDJJ is paid entirely by the state.

**Steps Taken:** Legislation passed creating Redeploy Illinois (730 ILCS 110/16.1) effective December 31, 2003.

**Partners:** The Governor; the General Assembly; the Redeploy Illinois Oversight Board (which includes the Department of Human Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission, Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, Criminal Justice Information Authority, Department of Children and Family Services, Cook County State's Attorney and others); county governments and community providers.

**Every year, hundreds of Illinois teenagers** enter the juvenile justice system by engaging in risk-taking and/or illegal behavior. The effect of incarceration on the lives of these youth is devastating and the cost to the State is enormous. With the passage of Redeploy Illinois, the Illinois General Assembly and former Governor Rod Blagojevich set Illinois on a new course of action in meeting the needs of delinquent youth.

**In State Fiscal Year 2005**, the per capita cost to Illinois tax-payers for incarcerating a single juvenile offender in a correctional institution was \$70,827 per year. The juvenile recidivism rate in Illinois was 48 percent<sup>1</sup>.

**Research suggests** that non-violent youth offenders are less likely to be involved in subsequent delinquent behavior if they remain in their home communities and receive appropriate services that address their underlying needs. Community-based services for juvenile offenders are less costly and more effective than institutional care in correctional facilities. However, a lack of local programs and services plays a significant role in a court's decision to commit a youth to IDJJ. Further, a commitment to IDJJ is paid by the state; local jurisdictions incur no cost, a fact that encourages communities to relinquish youth to incarceration rather than invest in community resources.

**Enter Redeploy Illinois.** The Redeploy Illinois pilot program gives counties financial support to



*St. Clair County Associate Judge Walter Brandon (left); Illinois Department of Human Services Secretary Carol L. Adams; Children's Home and Aid Society of Illinois Regional Vice President Renae Koller; Lynn Jarman, CHASI program director for youth services; Madison County Associate Judge Duane L. Bailey; and Karrie Rueter, acting bureau chief for the Redeploy Illinois program, speak at a press conference touting the success of the Redeploy Illinois program, which diverts juvenile offenders out of the court system and provides comprehensive social services for them. Photo courtesy: Scott Cousins of the Suburban Journals.*

provide community services to youth who might otherwise have been sent to IDJJ. In return, the pilot sites commit to reducing juvenile incarceration. The funds fill gaps in local programming and services available for delinquent youth, allowing counties to reduce their reliance on IDJJ. As a result, youth are being given opportunities to succeed, commitments to IDJJ are being reduced, and millions of dollars in costs to the state are being avoided.

**In its first three years of providing services**, Redeploy Illinois has demonstrated success. Approximately, 400 youth residing in pilot site communities were diverted from commitment to the IDJJ. Compared to the number of commitments occurring in the pilot sites prior to Redeploy Illinois, the reported diversions represented a 51 percent reduction in commitments. Had these youth been committed, it is estimated that the cost avoidance to Illinois could have totaled almost \$19 million<sup>2</sup>.

**Although cost savings is an important measure of success**, especially for a government-supported program, it is secondary to the initiative's effect on the lives of troubled youth. Redeploy Illinois has been successful in mobilizing communities to direct resources to youth offenders who otherwise would have been detained or worse, incarcerated. With the advent of Redeploy Illinois, many more youth offenders now have the opportunity to thrive and become productive citizens.

**Karrie Rueter is the acting bureau chief, Bureau of Youth Services and Delinquency Prevention, Division of Community Health and Prevention.**

<sup>1</sup> Illinois Dept. of Corrections website, "2005 Department Data," [http://www.idoc.state.il.us/subsections/reports/departments\\_data/Department%20Data%202005.pdf](http://www.idoc.state.il.us/subsections/reports/departments_data/Department%20Data%202005.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Redeploy Illinois Annual Report: Implementation and Impact, November 2008

**"If the future road looms ominous or unpromising then we need to gather our resolve and step off into another direction."**

**Maya Angelou**

## **A Solution: Open Door**

by Halle Ritter

**The testimony below illustrates** the extent to which the Open Door pilot program can positively impact a person's life.

*"The first time I came to Open Door for assistance I was in bad shape. Shortly after being released from prison, I was struggling with everything in my life including drug addiction, depression, and unemployment. I knew that if I did not receive help soon, my life would only get worse.*

*I heard about Open Door through one of my friends who was unemployed, on the verge of eviction, struggling with debilitating migraine headaches and in need of a medical card. She told me that literally during her first appointment with an Open Door case manager, he helped her get an appointment to see a doctor, expedited the processing of her medical card and even helped her get her prescriptions filled until her medical card was activated. The case manager even worked with her in developing her resume so that she was properly prepared to apply for jobs. Now, thanks to Open Door, my friend is working and through her medication, her migraines are controlled.*

*The Open Door case manager prevented my friend from roaming from place-to-place to find assistance. I tried the program and found my experience equally satisfying. My case manager immediately helped me find a mental health counselor and over the next several weeks, supported me through my recovery process. He helped me to develop my resume and find a job. I am proud to say that I am now employed full time and engaged to be married! Thanks to the program, I only had to open one door and was quickly moving in the right direction for all my needs. The staff in the Open Door office not only helped me find solutions to my problems, but also gave me the tools - - via resource materials -- so that if I ever needed help again I would know how to find it."*

**The Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) initiated Open Door** in December of 2007. This initiative is located at the DHS Division of Rehabilitation Services office on the west side of Chicago at 743 N. Pulaski. The pilot program was developed as a Region One Smart Path initiative, and is one of more than twenty integration

projects across the agency designed to integrate functions and services, and ensure that every door is an open door. Open Door is a public/private partnership with the Michael Reese Health Trust, Health & Disability Advocates, and Loyola University Center for Urban Research and Learning, other partner agencies, and community organizations. Open Door seeks to identify and evaluate the most immediate needs of its customers and then seamlessly connect them to the programs and services that will best meet their needs. It is the hope that by providing immediate aid and assistance to Open Door customers, the program will be able to provide the necessary support for people in crisis and assist them to self-sufficiency.

**During the past year**, more than 625 people have received immediate support through Open Door in the form of food, medication, clothing, and attainment of identification, transportation assistance, and housing. Additionally, Open Door has played a significant role in connecting individuals to employment opportunities, enrollment in vocational training programs, links to substance abuse counseling, as well as a range of mental health services.

**A key component to the program's success** is the positive relationships it has developed with several DHS and community providers that serve the west side of Chicago. The Open Door office was designed not only to help individuals during a time of crisis but to also serve as a resource for the general community. Now, a year after the program's inception, the community views Open Door, not just as a useful resource, but also as a good friend.

**For more information**, contact Halle Ritter at [halle.ritter@illinois.gov](mailto:halle.ritter@illinois.gov) or 773-638-3070.

**Halle Ritter is the coordinator for the Open Door Systems.**

## A Solution: Reentry and Reunification in Englewood

by Yvonne Jeffries with Gloster Mahon, Contributor

**The Family Reunification program** was born out of a partnership between Liberation Christian Center (LCC) and the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) in response to the deaths of two girls who were killed within days of each other while in what was supposed to be the safety of their homes. The killings of Siretha Woods (14) and Starkisia Reed (10) so outraged the community of Englewood that action was immediately needed to address the growing violence.

**Bishop James Dukes of LCC initiated** a grassroots effort of men in the community to organize a march to address unemployment, lack of alternative activities for youth, limited recreational areas, inadequate public services and the absence of major grocery stores where fruits and vegetables can be obtained in Englewood.

**DHS Secretary Carol L. Adams convened team meetings** with division directors to explore intervention strategies. DHS staff worked with community leaders and identified resources to support community initiatives in Englewood. One such initiative was a reentry program called Family Reunification, created to support ex-offenders and their families. Support for successful reentry is essential as they learn to reconnect with their families, communities and society. Most are returning with less than a high school education and little, if any, socially acceptable work experience. Families needed support adjusting to the return of individuals who might have lived in the home for years and who, prior to imprisonment, might have engaged in behaviors that put their families at risk.

**Englewood ranks number two** among communities in Chicago where ex-offenders return home. Meeting this challenge, LCC implemented a reentry program and works with a minimum of 25 ex-offenders a day between ages 17 and 65. People in the program might have as much as 30 years of incarceration and 50 years of substance abuse.

### LCC has built relationships

with a number of employers who are willing to hire ex-offenders. However, the average reentry age is 42, and employers prefer to hire younger people. Bishop Dukes said their biggest challenge is placing older offenders who they believe will make the better employee. Nonetheless, he says participants are learning to value their options. This challenge inspired a group of men to start what is now a successful shoeshine business.

### The Church's family reunification efforts

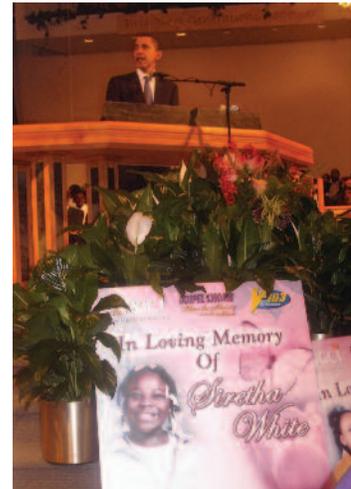
extended to working with children of ex-offenders. They were among 125 youth who participated in a summer youth employment program, which began with a three-day spiritual boot camp funded by Walgreens. Youth were assigned work in one of four types of organizations: not-for-profit faith-based and secular, medical treatment, for-profit, and civic. On payday, youth participated in life skills classes and learned budget management, responsible purchasing and problem-solving.

### Still motivated by the number of youth

who have been victims of violence in Englewood, Bishop Dukes said, "There is much left to do. Reunification is a holistic intervention that also includes cultural awareness and spiritual development, and it's working. I know it is working when a grandmother says, 'Thank God' because a grandfather comes home from jail, a father gets a job and a son stays out of trouble. She can see her faith being actualized."

**Yvonne Jeffries is a freelance writer and author of *Referee or Team Builder?: A Director's Role in Managing Conflict*.**

**Gloster Mahon is director of Special Programs, Office of the Secretary.**



*Then Senator Barack Obama pledged to fight for more resources for poor neighborhoods, but added that Blacks would have to save themselves.*

*Photo: Richard Muhammad*

## **The Serve Illinois Commission (Illinois Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service)**

by Kimberly Fornero

**Nothing exemplifies the American spirit** more than volunteering. The Serve Illinois Commission, consisting of 25 governor-appointed, bi-partisan board members, helps the state of Illinois preserve the American spirit of volunteerism. Its mission is to improve Illinois communities by enhancing traditional volunteer activities and supporting national service programs. The Commission is accomplishing this mission through: (1) the support of local community-based efforts to enhance volunteer opportunities; and (2) the administration of Illinois' AmeriCorps program.



importance of traditional volunteerism to the citizens of Illinois. The Commission provides assistance to volunteers, volunteer organizations, government agencies, and the public-at-large through a variety of activities, which include:

- Developing the new **www.Serve.Illinois.gov** web site with the new Serve Illinois Volunteer Opportunities Matching Portal
- Promoting national service days
- Enhancing volunteerism and service with awards and other recognition opportunities
- Providing individuals and organizations with informational materials such as the SERVE Illinois newsletter and other fact sheets
- Assisting in the training and professional development of Illinois' volunteer managers
- Co-sponsoring conferences and training throughout the state

**Serve Illinois partners include thousands** of local not-for-profit community agencies that recruit and support volunteers, and the Commission's partners in the state's Volunteer Management Network; the Corporation for National and Community Service (the federal funding agency of AmeriCorps); USA Freedom Corps; and the Network for Good.

**Illinois was the second state** commission in the country to partner with the Network for Good and USA Freedom Corps to make the volunteer opportunity search capability available. Now interested citizens are only a click away from information about a wide variety of opportunities throughout the state.

**Kimberly Fornero is the acting executive director of the Serve Illinois Commission, Bureau of Community-Based & Primary Prevention, Division of Community Health & Prevention.**

**The Commission envisions Illinois** as a place where all citizens recognize their abilities and responsibilities to help strengthen their communities through voluntary service. It works to expand volunteerism throughout rural, suburban, and urban Illinois, involving people of all backgrounds, cultures, and ages.

**The enabling legislation** of the Serve Illinois Commission (PA91-798, 20 ILCS 710) charges the Commission to promote and support community service in public and private programs in order to meet the needs of Illinois citizens, to stimulate new volunteerism and community service initiatives and partnerships, and to serve as a resource and advocate within the Department of Human Services for community service agencies, volunteers, and programs that utilize state and private volunteers.

**Through a variety of activities**, the Illinois Commission strives to increase awareness and the

## The Northern Illinois University Tragedy - A New Way to Serve

by Michael S. Pelletier, M.A.

**I was driving home after a long** but typical workday at the Elgin Mental Health Center when I turned on the radio. The news: Random shooting at Northern Illinois University (NIU). Five NIU students killed. The shooter, an NIU student, turns gun on himself. It was Valentine's Day 2008.

**I immediately called my boss**, Dr. Lorrie Jones, director of the Division of Mental Health (DMH), to offer my assistance. Dr. Jones told me to go to the NIU campus and coordinate mental health support services with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) site manager.

**Although I had a strong sense** of what would be required, it was also a reminder that every mass tragedy is unique. Before IEMA and DMH could respond effectively, I not only needed to answer a host of questions, but to ask them as well.

**The shootings took seconds.** However, the time and effort required for all that is involved in the healing process cannot be measured. During the next month, staff functioned under a Code Red. Over 400 volunteer mental health professionals, including those from our state hospitals and provider networks, were assembled to support NIU students, faculty and staff as they acknowledged their resilience.

**The responsibilities DMH assumed** for meeting immediate and emerging needs related to the NIU tragedy helped us tap into our resilience, too. Our assignments ranged from ensuring access to Family Community Resource Center resources, to collaborating with NIU administrative, legal and finance teams. We were involved in developing successful grant proposals to secure federal reimbursement for new university mental health services. We opened doors for other state agencies to aid the NIU family in coming to practical terms with the longer term aspects of the tragedy. We also worked with other DHS divisions, including Human Capital Development and Rehabilitative Services.

**The professional commitment** we made to NIU was extended to DeKalb area residents. DMH Transformation Director, Dr. John Holton, worked with the Ben Gordon Center, a local mental health provider. Together, they crafted a federally approved grant proposal for emergency first-aid education and hands-on training to

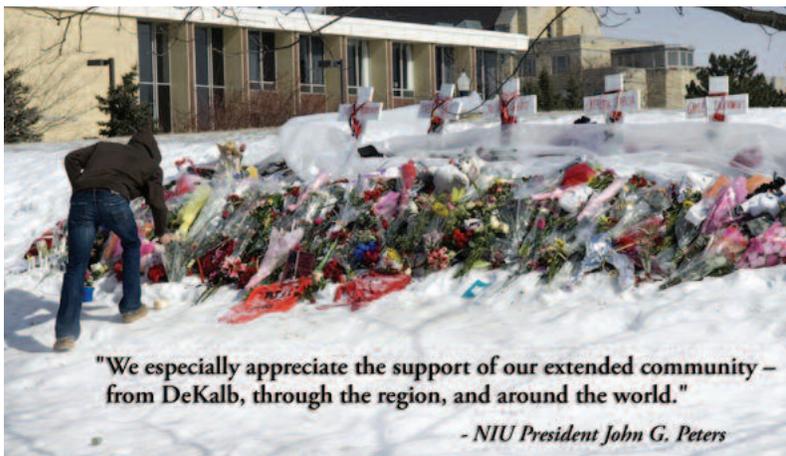
local social services providers. They also developed protocols to more efficiently respond to community-wide emergencies.

**It is a bitter irony** that the NIU incident confirmed the significance of the division's contributions to the Illinois Campus Security Taskforce (CSTF), formed after the Virginia Tech tragedy. CSTF's solutions are always grounded in three principles: Safety, Security and Prevention. They fostered the secure environment needed for the fruitful exchange of knowledge and ideas.

**Developing and implementing** an immediate and effective strategy for responding to mental health needs of the general public in a crisis situation was the challenge. It was met with the highest level of knowledge, skills and professionalism. However, there were moments during which "human services" did not necessarily mean the undertaking of official duties, but the sharing, talking, supporting, and bonding (sometimes intensely) with others. These moments are sometimes as brief as those taken to end six lives, but no less meaningful.

**In a very real way, that day still hasn't ended** for me. But being a part of a solution that was instrumental in reconciling an extraordinarily violent day with a renewed sense of healing, confirms the importance of being on the front line, and the common obligation all of us have to answer the call.

**Michael S. Pelletier is the special assistant to the Director, Division of Mental Health.**



"We especially appreciate the support of our extended community – from DeKalb, through the region, and around the world."

- NIU President John G. Peters

**"We wanted something for ourselves and our children, so we took a chance with our lives."**

**Unita Blackwell**



## **Platinum Customer Service Going the Extra Mile (PCS GEM)**

by Martha Younger-White

**The Platinum Customer Service** Going the Extra Mile (PCS GEM) Smart Path initiative was launched in June 2008. This exciting initiative puts customers and employees at the heart of the Illinois Department of Human Services. Many employees serve DHS customers directly, and all serve each other as colleagues. A basic premise of PCS GEM is that the better customer service provided, the higher degree of self-sufficiency DHS customers experience, which leads to greater job satisfaction for employees.



DHS Secretary Carol L. Adams and executive team members served lunch to PCS awardees and other DHS staff.

**In conjunction with PCS GEM**, a pilot customer satisfaction survey was conducted at 22 sites across the state in order to see how DHS clients experience the services they receive.

**The agency's ability** to provide the highest levels of customer service will be enhanced via PCS GEM components (all available on-line for staff at <http://intranet.dhs.onenet/page.aspx?item=39489>), which include:

- Customer Service Training
- Employee Customer Service Awards (on-the-spot awards and annual awards ceremony)
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys, both on-line and through local offices
- Exchange of new ideas for enhanced customer service

**The idea that everybody** is somebody's customer drives the design and implementation of PCS GEM. By publicly recognizing and rewarding employees whose performance meets our standard for high quality, PCS GEM shows how much DHS values its employees.

**Last October, two enthusiastic caravans** of executive staff and PCS GEM committee staff

traveled to southern Illinois to recognize employees at two DHS offices: Williamson County Family Community Resource Center in Marion, and the co-located site in Mt. Vernon where staff from Human Capital Development, Department of Rehabilitation Services and Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse work together. These staff members were recognized with PCS GEM tote bags, pens, lanyards, certificates and other items.

### **Employees' response to and appreciation**

of being recognized and rewarded is reflected in the comments below:

#### **Alan Summers, Regional Administrator Region 5:**

*I wanted to express my thanks to you and the other team members for taking time out of your busy schedules to come to Region 5 and celebrate the work of the HCD staff. My staff truly enjoyed meeting all of you, and it helped rebuild morale that had suffered recently due to the announced layoffs. Your willingness to come to the trenches and express your appreciation for their work is priceless.*

#### **Mark Drake, LOA Williamson County FCRC:**

*The event was great, and the staff is still buzzing about all the activities. Thanks again.*

**PCS GEM is a solution** that has and will continue to benefit DHS employees and clients. Moving forward, Smart Path Regional Liaisons will be a part of PCS GEM activities. On-the-spot rewards will be made by supervisors and tracked by Regional Liaisons. Other rewards will be given for completing 18 hours (PCS Charm) or 36 hours (GEM Ambassadorship Charm) of customer service training offered through the Bureau of Training and Development. Additionally, nominated employees (by anyone) will be awarded at an annual reception attended by Secretary Adams. PCS GEM items such as PCS GEM pens, magnets and notepads have already been distributed to all employees in recognition of jobs well done.

**DHS employees are gems.** So, going the extra mile is not new; taking the time to say "thank you" to them in a different way throughout the year, and offering an interactive intranet site where employee input creates even better customer service is. What began in 2008 will become the way we do business in 2009 and for years to come.

**Martha Younger-White is the director of the Office of Accessibility And Customer Support.**

## “Don’t Dis’ Your Ability” Resource Fair for Persons With Violently Acquired Disabilities

by Ken Williams

**For a number of years**, violence prevention programs have operated in the Metropolitan Chicago area with a focus on prevention and intervention to reduce the level of violence in our communities. Even though these programs have had an impact on stemming the wave of violence in many of the city’s affected communities, a growing concern still lingered. What happens to the victims of violence who acquire significant disabilities such as paralysis from spinal cord injuries and traumatic brain injuries? What options are available and where do they go for support to ensure the greatest degree of self-sufficiency and productivity? These individuals are part of a rapidly expanding, underserved population returning to urban communities and in many instances “failing through the cracks” in part, because of their level of awareness of available resources and services. Fortified with the understanding that information is power, DHS conducted a resource fair last June at the Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education to empower persons with violently acquired disabilities and their families.

**In preparation for the resource fair**, DHS met with individuals who had violently acquired disabilities and were already working in communities in Chicago in an effort to make a positive difference in the lives of their peers. One such individual was Levon Stone from an organization known as Metropolitan Area Group for Igniting Civilization (MAGIC). He shared his experience pre- and post-disability, conveyed the many problems his peers faced, and explained how he wanted to help.

**Later, a citywide Violence Acquired Disability Focus Group** was developed and coordinated by the DHS Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS). The forum was attended by persons with violently acquired disabilities, as well as representatives from other DHS divisions, Access Living Center for Independent Living, Advocate Christ Medical Center, Broken Wingz, Chicago Park District, Midwest Wheelchair Sports and Social Club, Schwab Rehabilitation Center, and the University of Illinois Disability and Human Development. Some major concerns presented in the forum included the need for accessible and affordable housing, wheelchair maintenance and repair support, and greater assistance for the successful transition from the hospital to the community.



*During Resource Fair, Mamie Rodgers, DHS Acting Director of Community Relations, confers with Levon Stone of the Metropolitan Area Group for Igniting Civilization.*

**Responses to those concerns**, and much more, were provided by representatives from offices of the Mayor of Chicago and Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County, forum representatives, and other community partners participating in the resource fair. Touting the theme “Don’t Dis’ Your Disability,” the resource fair featured interactive workshops, guest speakers, DRS vocational and home services intakes, and booths full of information. The goal was to make sure that persons with violently acquired disabilities, and their families, were not only aware of the plethora of available resources, but were also encouraged to utilize all possible resources and every aspect of their talents to move forward and experience the highest level of personal independence. The fair included the dissemination of information regarding the following:

- Secretary of State I.D. Program – (i.e., identification cards, disability placards, etc.)
- Housing
- Expungement Procedures
- Social Security Benefits
- Medicaid Coverage and Food Stamp/Link Card
- Employment Services
- Educational Services
- Training Opportunities
- In-Home Services Home Modification
- Disability Rights
- Assistive Technology

**Ken Williams is the manager of the Independent Unit, Division of Rehabilitation Services.**

## Changing Climates

by Willeva D. Lindsey

**Illinois weather in 2007 – 2008 was unique**, different than any other winter weather in the prior 110 years. A large number of warm-season type squalls were intermixed with a very large number of winter storms. There was an odd mix of all types of severe weather including thunderstorms, hail, tornadoes, heavy rains and damaging winds. Ice storms caused trees to fall on power lines that snapped like toothpicks. Families were without power and heat.

**With the warm spring weather** came rain and floods. Homes and businesses were nearly inundated with floodwaters. DHS customers and their families from Adams County on the west to Iroquois County on the East, from urban Cook County to rural Henderson County were affected by these storms. At the onset of each inclement meteorological onslaught, DHS administrators along with their many partners, such as advocates, stakeholders, public and private agency employees, local elected officials, school personnel and volunteers statewide pressed into action.



*Office of Safety and Emergency Preparedness staff and volunteers confer with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, the Illinois State Police, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Illinois National Guard prior to deployment to disaster areas.*

*An Aerial Surveillance Team assesses flood damages during a helicopter ride at Grafton, Illinois.*



*A house nearly underwater in Alton, Illinois.*



*Volunteers came from all around to fill bags with sand in an effort to stave off rising waters. Then U.S. Senator Barack Obama was among the hundreds of people who came to the rescue.*

**Willeva D. Lindsey is manager/writer of Community Relations.**

## On Another Note



**While on the campaign trail**, then U.S. Senator Obama and Mrs. Obama met Illinois School for the Deaf students during a rally in Springfield. Later the Obamas invited ISD students to Springfield when then U.S. Senator Joe Biden was introduced as candidate for Vice President. In January, eighteen Illinois School for the Deaf students, five staff members and one volunteer attended the Inauguration of President Barack Obama. Tickets were provided by Illinois Senator Deanna Demuzio. The group visited Arlington National Cemetery, attended the concert at Lincoln Memorial, and the Swearing-In of the 44th President and Vice President. Students were guests at Gallaudet University, the only liberal arts college for deaf



students in the world. Interpreters from the United States Capitol Accessibility Services provided the American Sign Language Interpretation of President Obama's Oath of Office to Illinois School For the Deaf students, near the U.S. Capitol during the Presidential Inauguration.



**Nakisha Wilkins is a pastry chef** at Bennigan's Restaurant. Nakisha is deaf. When she graduated from high school she considered going to college or maybe becoming a hairdresser. Instead she decided what she really wanted to be was a chef. After learning culinary arts at Job Corps in Joliet, she moved to Quad Cities to be near friends she met while participating in the Program for the Hearing Impaired at Northern Illinois University. Initially unable to find employment, she sought help from the Rock Island Office of Rehabilitation Services and the rest is history.

**“All you need in the world is love and laughter.  
... to have love in one hand and laughter in the other.”**

**August Wilson**



**DHS employees' generosity and holiday spirit are shared** with students at the Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD), the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI), and the Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education - Roosevelt (ICRE-R) during the 15th Annual Angel Tree celebration. More than 100 gifts were donated this past winter. Students who received gifts were selected by school staff and a list of needed items were provided to employees who requested to adopt an "Angel." Included among the participants was a Santa Claus who provided American Sign Language Interpretation for students who are deaf.

**Fleece blankets were donated to residents** of the Wm. W. Fox Development Center. Tammie, Marla and Bob Ostrowski of Kankakee, Illinois made 132 blankets - one for each person. Tammie Ostrowski works as a physical therapist. Her parents, Bob and Marla, are retired. The three of them purchased the materials and cut and sewed the blankets. Fox Center Social Worker, Deb Ranger, helped to coordinate this effort.



**For the past three years, John Tait**, former offensive lineman with the Chicago Bears, has donated 10 tickets to every home football game to students at Illinois Center for Rehabilitation-Roosevelt. ICRE has also received \$1,000 each year from the Chicago Bears Care Program, "Tait's Tot's." Shortly before he retired, Tait visited the facility and took pictures with ICRE students.



# solutions...

we're part of

## Recovery Radio

by Mamie L. Rodgers

**Recovery Radio aired for the first time** on WVON-1690 AM on September 30, 2007 and the Illinois Department of Human Services became an active partner on July 6, 2008. It is a 60-minute call-in radio program that educates the public about the recovery process and supports people currently in recovery. The show is an extension of the Division of Mental Health **"Say it out loud"** campaign and features DHS staff members, other experts, and people sharing their stories.

**As DHS Secretary Carol L. Adams points out**, most everyone has something from which they need to recover. Their addictions could include legal or illegal drugs, excessive sweets or other unhealthy foods, toxic people, and behaviors such as gambling,



*Bindi Desai-Lessing, DHS Regional Nutritionist Consultant*

sex and shopping. She goes on to say, "Fighting addictions is difficult and requires a lot of ammunition. Recovery Radio is an effort to get listeners talking, past the stage of denial, into treatment, and on the road to recovery."

**Recognizing the challenges** associated with fighting an addiction, Recovery Radio's host Dr. Dorothy Thomas, Director

of Addiction Services at Loretto Hospital and a certified addictions counselor, dialogues with guests who are knowledgeable about addictions and sensitive to the needs of those who are seeking support.



*Tanya Anderson, M.D., chief of Clinical Service System, DMH, with Dr. Dorothy Thomas, host of Recovery Radio.*

**During African American History Month**, Tanya Anderson, M.D., chief, Clinical Service System, Division of Mental Health, joined Dr. Thomas to discuss recovery and resilience in the African American Community. They discussed the positive role the church can play in the process. The show was highly successful as indicated by the number of listeners who called in and the positive feedback that was received.

**Since the show started**, guests and listeners have covered a range of life issues associated with addiction, allowing for topics such as parenting, stress management, crime, and family violence.

**Recovery Radio airs every Sunday** on WVON-1690 AM from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m., and streams live at [www.wvon.com](http://www.wvon.com).

The call-in number is 773-591-1690.

**Mamie L. Rodgers is the acting director of Community Relations.**



Illinois Department of Human Services  
100 South Grand Avenue East, Third Floor  
Springfield, Illinois 62762

PRSR STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Springfield, IL 62762  
PERMIT NO. 640